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ABSTRACT

A sample of 204 counseling students and counselors with differing levels of experience and education from Utah colleges, universities, and public schools was asked to rate themselves and the ideal counselor on 38 semantic differential scales. Discrepancy scores derived from self-ideal differences were analyzed and found to support the hypotheses that inexperienced counseling students report greater self-ideal counselor discrepancies than experienced counselors. The differences dissolved, however, when the effects of increased formal training achieved by experienced counselors were controlled. Indices of both experience and formal training were shown to be related to reduction in counselors' self-ideal counselor discrepancy scores. Experience and formal training were also shown to be interactive, and when their interaction effects were partialed out, counseling experience was shown to have a greater influence on reducing discrepancy scores than was level of formal training. (Author)

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Education, Experience and Discrepant Self/Ideal Counselor Concepts

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Writings about counselors often cite lists of qualities the effective counselor should possess. However, to quote Arbuckle (1965):

> If, indeed, there were some human creature who possesses all these characteristics to a high degree, a client would probably find the development of a warm relationship with him a difficult thing since he would be so far removed from the world in which the client lived. (p. 85).

Pepinsky and Pepinsky (1954) stated some years ago that a counselor possessed of all desirable counselor characteristics would be better equipped for divine rather than vocational counseling.

Needless to say, few counselors, if any, would consider themselves to possess all the qualities of the ideal counselor. It is more likely that most counselors consider themselves near their counselor-ideal in some respects and far from it in others. It might also follow that counselors will feel they are moving closer to their concept of the ideal counselor as they gain more competence and confidence through formal training and experience.

This study was an attempt to relate counseling experience and level of formal training to discrepancies between counselors' self-as-counselor-now and ideal counselor concepts. Specifically, it is hypothesized that:

1. A greater discrepancy will exist between inexperienced counseling students' self and ideal counselor concepts than between the self and ideal counselor concepts of experienced counselors.

2. The discrepancy between counselors' self and ideal counselor concepts will decrease among counselors who have accumulated increasing years of experience.

3. The discrepancy between counselors' self and ideal counselor concepts will decrease among counselors who have achieved increasing levels of formal training.

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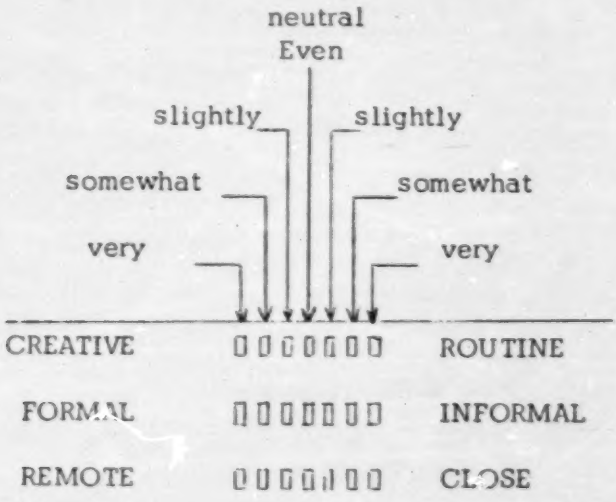
Subjects in the study were students enrolled in counselor education programs at Brigham Young University, the University of Utah,and Utah State University; counselors at these three institutions plus Weber State College (Ogden, Utah); and public school counselors selected randomly from those employed in Utah, winter, 1974. Students and counselors from the university/college settings were volunteers; the public school counselors were contacted by mail--64% responded. Total N was 204.

The instrument used consisted of 38 semantic differential scales (Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum, 1957) composed of opposite adjective pairs selected for their relevance to counselors and counseling. Example:



Subjects were asked to complete two identical sets of 38 scales, on the first set rating themselves as counselors now and on the second rating the ideal counselor. Summed absolute differences between self and ideal ratings on the 38 scales constituted each subject's discrepancy score.

Subjects responded anonymously but were asked to indicate years of counseling experience and level of education. Discrepancy scores for groups selected in terms of experience and education were subjected to statistical analysis to determine if the hypotheses were supported.

Findings and discussion

To determine if counseling students with no experience expressed greater disparity between their self and ideal counselor ratings than did counselors with experience, as stated in hypothesis one, mean discrepancy scores for Ss with counseling experience (N=144) and without experience (N=60) were subjected to a t-test. The results were t=3.51, indicating a difference significant at beyond the .01 level. The mean discrepancy score for inexperienced counselors was 43.9, for experienced counselors 35.6, indicating less discrepancy between self and ideal counselor concepts for experienced Ss, thus supporting hypothesis one, as stated.

However, the data showed that experienced counselors often also had higher levels of formal training than inexperienced Ss. To reduce possible effects of training, mean discrepancy scores for inexperienced (N=48) and experienced N=47) Ss who held bachelors degrees only were t-tested, with t=1.32. The difference between means (inexperienced M=44.6, experienced M=40.2) was not significant, so hypothesis one, when effects of training were controlled, was not supported.

To test hypotheses two and three, subjects were assigned index numbers based on two variables related to formal training--highest degree earned and number of semester/quarter hours earned beyond the highest degree--and years of counseling experience. There were three degree levels: bachelors, masters, and doctorate; two levels of additional formal training: more and less than 20 semester/30 quarter hours accumulated beyond highest earned degree; and five levels of counseling experience: no experience, 1-2 years', 3-5 years', 6-10 years' and 11 or more years' experience. Indexing was arranged so that inexperienced beachelors level counseling students with fewer than 20 semester/30 quarter hours had the lowest index numbers, doctoral level counselors with 11 or more years of experience and high additional training had the highest. Indexing for subjects with in-between levels of formal training and experience fell between these extremes in ascending order.

Correlation coefficients were run between the dependent variable--Ss' self-ideal counselor discrepancy scores--and index numbers for levels of experience, additional semester/quarter hours earned, and degree held. Table 1 shows the intercorrelations between these variables.

Table 1

Correlations Between Indices of Experience, Additional Hours, Degree Held, and Discrepancy Scores

	A	B	C	D	E
A Experience		.035	.498	.922	-.288*
B Additional Hours (a)			-.484	.182	.095
C Degree Held				.622	-.274*
D A+B+C					-.283*
E Discrepancy Score					

(a) Point biserial correlations used because this variable is dichotomous. All others are Pearson product moment.

* $P < .01$

The correlations shown indicate a significant inverse relationship between discrepancy scores and accumulated experience (r=-.288), degree held (r=-.274), and the combined indices of experience, additional hours and degree held (r=-.283). These findings are in the direction stated in hypotheses two and three; i.e., increased experience or higher college degrees relate significantly to lower discrepancy scores. There was virtually no relationship between additional hours and discrepancy scores (r_{pbi}=.095).

The data presented thus far lend support to hypotheses two and three: indices designed to reflect counselors' increasing levels of experience and formal training do relate inversely to their self-ideal counselor discrepancy scores. In this sense, either indices of experience or formal training can be used to predict to some extent how far a counselor might feel removed from his counselor-ideal.

When we look more closely at the data in Table 1, we see that experience and degree held are not pure factors. They correlate with each other .498 and degree held correlates -.484 with additional hours. (Additional hours shows virtually no relationship to experience: r =.035). This interrelationship between the independent variables reduces the certainty with which we can say to what extent either experience or formal training taken alone accounts for counselors' self-ideal discrepancy scores.

To determine to what extent each independent variable alone related to discrepancy scores, partial correlations were run partialing out interactive effects. Discrepancy scores and experience, with additional hours and degree held partialed out, was $r_{ea.bc}$=-.168; discrepancy scores and additional hours, with experiences and degree held partialed out, was $r_{eb.ac}$=.024; and discrepancy scores and degree held, with experience and additional hours partialed out, was $r_{ec.ab}$=-.117. These figures suggest that experience contributes most to reducing counselors' self-ideal discrepancies, followed by degree held. Additional hours of training contributes little to changes in discrepancy scores.

A multiple correlation was run to examine how closely the indices of the independent variables taken in combination related to discrepancy scores. This analysis yielded r=.326 suggesting that experience, degree held, and additional hours are to a degree related to discrepancy scores.

Summary

A sample of 204 counseling students and counselors with differing levels of experience and education from Utah colleges, universities and public schools was asked to rate themselves and the ideal counselor on 38 semantic differential scales. Discrepancy scores derived from self-ideal differences were analyzed and found to support the hypotheses that inexperienced counseling students report greater self-ideal counselor discrepancies than experienced counselors. The differences disolved, however, when the effects of increased formal training achieved by experienced counselors were controlled.

Indices of both experience and formal training were shown to be related to reduction in counselors' self-ideal counselor discrepancy scores. Experience and formal training were also shown to be interactive and when their interaction effects were partialed out, counseling experience was shown to have a greater influence on reducing discrepancy scores than was level of formal training.

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